

Leonardo Secures New AED Contract for F-35

BY RICHARD SCOTT

Leonardo UK's electronic warfare (EW) business (Luton, UK) has secured a further \$53.3 million contract from the US Naval Air Systems Command (NAVAIR) for the supply of its AN/ALQ-260(V) Active Expendable Decoy (AED) to the F-35 Lightning II strikefighter program.

The sole-source award – exercising an option to a base year contract originally placed in December 2024 – includes procurement of AEDs as well as initial spare impulse cartridges and support equipment. AN/ALQ-260(V) is the US designation for Leonardo's BriteCloud 218 (2x1x8-inch form factor) expendable active decoy. (See this month's cover story on DRFM technology for more about the BriteCloud AED.)

While Leonardo is prevented from publicly commenting on the integration of the AN/ALQ-260(V) into the F-35, NAVAIR in April 2025 provided background to the program as part of a news release recognizing the award of the Defense Exceptional Civilian Service medal to Clint Stammer, F-35 Lightning II Joint Program Office electronic attack and countermeasures lead at the Naval Air Warfare Center Weapons Division in Point Mugu, Calif. Stammer is credited with creating the multinational Jamming and Countermeasures Center (JCC) initiative, and he also initiated work to integrate the AN/ALQ-260(V)1 AED into the F-35.

According to NAVAIR, research to integrate BriteCloud 218 into the F-35 began at the JCC in 2022. "Stammer drove the rapid effort to identify, test and field the system," it said. "His team took it from initial requirement to the fleet in less than two years. Completed in September 2023, the system now

protects US and allied aircrews worldwide.”

BriteCloud 218 was previously the subject of a Foreign Comparative Test (FCT) program conducted by the US Air National Guard (ANG)/Air Force Reserve Test Center. The FCT, which included hardware in-the-loop trials, ground-based system evaluations and flight trials from ANG F-16 aircraft, culminated in 2022 with a fielding recommendation and assignment of the designation AN/ALQ-260(V).

The AN/ALQ-260(V) decoy provides the F-35 with additional protection against radio frequency (RF) threats. The aircraft is already fitted with BAE Systems’ AN/ASQ-239 integrated EW suite (which includes an integral self-defense jammer) and can also deploy the BAE Systems AN/ALE-70 towed RF decoy.